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Should landowners help pay for cover crop expenses?

Education may be first step in getting landowner support for cover crops.

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Are cover crops a cost that you should incur alone as tenant on cash-rent farms if you choose to use them? Are you going to see more benefit than the landowner? If the landowner won't help pay for them, are they still worth doing?

Related: Know which cover crops you can plant late and which you can't

You will likely get answers all over the board on this one. There appears to be no set rules or standards for whether a landowner helps pay for cover crop expenses or not on cash rent land.



Educate about soil health: Cover crops help improve soil over time, which can be of value to landowner and tenant.

Paul Marcellino and the Purdue University Extension Land Lease team believe it's a topic worth discussing in a state that leads the nation in cover crops by various parameters. He is the Extension educator in Howard County and a member of the team.

The first step may be education as to the benefits of cover crops. They're a key ingredient in improving soil health, which is a hot topic in Indiana. Barry Fisher, manager of regional soil health divisions for the Natural resources conservation Service, says the benefits are long-term, and result in increased organic matter over time. They also promote deeper rooting, and contribute to higher yields where farmers stay with no-till and cover crops over time, Fisher believes.

One farmer educated his landowner well. She knew he was no-tilling and using cover crops on her farm, and paying the total bill. He was doing it because he believed it helped his bottom line in the long run. She apparently realized it was also improving her farm.

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When she proposed raising his cash rent by \$30 per acre, he finally told her he would do it, but he would drop out cover crops. That was the cost of cover crops for him, since he applied his own, and if he had to pay more rent, he couldn't afford the cover crops.

She immediately backed off and agreed to the same rent as the year before, assuming he would continue with the cover crops.

Thinking about a cover crop? Start with developing a plan. Download the FREE Cover Crops: Best Management Practices report today, and get the information you need to tailor a cover crop program to your needs.

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